

## AN URBAN PLANNING AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN MOROCCO: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CAPITAL, RABAT

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### ABSTRACT

*Rabat is a living example of the twentieth century town planning and architecture that are closely linked to colonial politics (1912-1956). The city, a remarkable masterpiece, bears witness to an urban and architectural style resulting from the expertise of a multidisciplinary team.*

*The methodology used in this paper is carrying an evaluation of the main approaches used for the creation of the new city Rabat from a bare ground, and the experimentation of urban landscape based on spatial functionalism, landscape treatment, urban composition and the architectural planning. The second part of the paper focus on the architectural styles developed in the new city that reflects the fusion of Western and local architectural features. Highlighting the architectural design influenced by different decorative art expressions which reflects the cultural and symbolic landmarks.*

*This article aims to evoke the different aspects that made it possible to shape and maintain that space of the old center of the city of Rabat today.*

**KEYWORDS:** Urbain Design, Colonial Creation, Urbain Composition, Architectural Styles & Rabat

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### INTRODUCTION

In Morocco, architecture and urban planning were, throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an essential instrument in the French colonial policy. To achieve its urban design of the new colony, Resident General Hubert Lyautey brought the architect Henri Prost<sup>1</sup>. This latter has formed a team of young architects, with Albert Laprade, Laforgue and many others, who have designed the development plans and major equipment of cities such as Rabat, Casablanca, Fez, Meknes and Marrakech. With his experience in urban planning, Henri Prost was able to compare political, cultural and aesthetic approaches to innovate a new architectural style that will be later referred to as Moroccan school. In a virgin territory, these architects expressed their talents with a technical and scientific know-how that allowed them to produce incomparable masterpieces. Morocco, and starting with its new capital,

<sup>1</sup>He arrived in Morocco after he has been in Istanbul where he proposed a new urban plan and after his brilliant contribution to the project of Antwerp development, but he was especially noticed by Lyautey for his vision of social role of architecture that he himself shared.

has been a privileged ground for experimentation of new urban and architectural techniques. Under direction of Marshal Lyautey and the architect Henri Prost, a town planning strategy has been put in place, of which here some principle keys

Separate Medinas and European cities:

- Protecting cultural heritage;
- Create modern urbanism for Europeans.

By completely separating European and Moroccan agglomerations, Marshal Lyautey wanted, in addition to satisfying moral, economic and security concerns, to preserve the aspect of traditional cities. This approach has had the advantage of preserving intact the traditional urban heritage, by setting up large openings and visual perspectives of the new city towards the medina. We can cite some examples:

- Contemplate the medinas of Rabat, Salé and Oudayas, as well as the mouth of the river from the base of Hassan Tower;
- Observe the panorama of medina and ramparts from the Agdal platform;
- Free the view of the entire Medina from the general Residence.

### **Rabat: The Capital Garden City**

*"Prost's main objective was to achieve the most of an exceptional topographic situation. With skill, negotiation, exchange, he managed to keep, with three parks, forming three view cones. The beautiful panorama formed by the two sister cities of Rabat and Salé, all white encircled by their fawn-coloured enclosures, bordered by the estuary of the great river and the ocean. Rabat as an administrative capital had to have an elegant city expression »<sup>2</sup>*

Rabat is one of the Moroccan cities that has known another European presence before French Protectorate, either for political reasons (recognition of the country), or for economic reasons (commercial activities).

The conversion of Rabat into a capital began on July 28, 1912 with the implementation of principal General Residence, and the arrival of Sultan Moulay Youssef. Rabat has been chosen capital instead of Casablanca, because Lyautey deemed that the capital should be protected from economic influences and from any risk of communication interruption. Besides, its strategic coastal and central location compared to the whole country has weighed in Lyautey's choice. By settling in Rabat, Lyautey thought to isolate the HQ of government and prevent him from being involved in the active life of the great settlers of Casablanca.

Lyautey granted a particular attention to the development of "its capital" Rabat. His goal was to make the capital "a green and a flowery city, a true garden city" following the design of the park system as imagined by Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier in 1906, a great gardener of Paris and a friend of Lyautey. Consequently and from the beginning of the Protectorate, we witness an unprecedented urban extension. This latter is performed through the incorporation of the General Residence, which stands in the middle of a park and surrounded by beautiful administrative buildings that are integrated into the leafy setting, as well as villas of different sizes concealed in private gardens in the so-called "Quartier de Plaisance"

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<sup>2</sup>Albert Laprade, Lyautey urbaniste, in l'officier de réserve, numéro spécial Lyautey

Rabat is revealed as an "airy city where the tree holds a very important place, where you find climbing plants everywhere, bougainvillea and lianas aurora climb and fall on walls. Rabat remains a city to the measure of the man and it emanates always this "softness of which we often speak in contrast with the trepidation of its neighbours Casablanca"<sup>3</sup>

Two revealing features of the new models of urban planning characterized Prost's vision of Rabat Plan: The first reflected his desire to create a system of parks and public gardens across the city (essential principle of his master Hénard)<sup>4</sup>. The second is the underground railway system in the center of the city reflecting the direct influence of Tony Garnier's proposal for his industrial city (the central station is halfway between medina and the administrative district). The plan was based on conditions previously established by Lyautey: Low-rise joined buildings, allowing communication between the different services, and if necessary, with the possibility of extension. Gardens, kiosks, pergolas or fountains were placed in a way that creates a harmonious space of calm and tranquility within this composition, Rabat was supposed to be a model of reference for the development of other cities.

## **TWO DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR THE CITY**

During the colonial period, Rabat benefited from two development plans.

The first was Prost's, who, while considering the directives of Lyautey, had to keep in mind several structuring elements for the development of the capital, namely the palace and the medina which had to be left intact. The zoning and imposed easements had followed consequently those guidelines. Given that the global space was reserved for the European city, Prost nonetheless proposed a small city just like the Medina (Cité Habous on Avenue de Témara in DiourJamaa) where some Moroccans lived. It has also enabled large Moroccan developers to set up neighbourhood like Al Akkari. As for the military, they were given large spaces by the seafront.

Thus, the urban development plan that was developed by Prost, implemented by the Sherifian Dahir on August 13, 1917, and modified according to the Dahir of January 20, 1923, organized the growth of the city for three decades. This plan was designed according to the residential area and civil servants district. The business district was to be located on vacant lots in the south of the medina. Residential areas of different types have been located in the west, and a small Moroccan town on the periphery (Habous city).

Michel Ecochard developed the second urban plan<sup>5</sup> in 1947. His work was based on the principles of the Athens Charter, a little far from Prost's ideas, who was rather in the so-called culturalist approach, this is to say that he was seeking a certain aestheticism, responding mainly and only to the interests of the European population. As for Ecochard, given the evolutions and changes occurring in the country, he focused more on the problems of shanty towns and the over-densification of the city. His plan revolved around the principles of considering the growth of the agglomeration's population and the emerging imbalance between the two cities Rabat and Salé.

### **The New City, a Centralized Urban Production.**

In colonial Morocco, the urban matter was a public affair. It was a major concern of Lyautey's services. It is in this context, marked by a strong interventionist approach, that the colonial city was fashioned. The state became an

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Brulot, *Découverte de Rabat*, Rabat, ed la Porte, 1972

<sup>4</sup>

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urbanist developer marking the space with power symbols. The urban decision of establishing a new city in Rabat has been preceded by the political decision of making Rabat the capital of the new colonial regime<sup>6</sup> to establish "the head office of the plant"<sup>7</sup>.

The political and urban visions were inseparable in the construction of the new city of Rabat, in the sense that the body that decided on its political status was at the same time the one that sketched the outlines of its urban plans. Indeed, in addition to his political role, Lyautey Resident General, was an enthusiast of urban planning and he was the engineer of the general ideas. He sketched himself the plans of the cities.

It is in this context that the first development plan of Rabat was gradually established, between 1914 and 1918, by Prost<sup>8</sup>. This plan was inspired by the European<sup>9</sup> model to which Prost has integrated American and German styles that influenced<sup>10</sup> his designs. This has resulted spatially in separating the functions into distinct zones and establishing a network of inland channels connected to the regional communication system.

The development was based on the following elements:

- Zoning by the functional, ethnic and social separation of neighbourhoods;
- Distributing regularly in the city, the park systems, gardens for hygiene and aesthetic reasons;
- Implementing an urban structure on interregional communication channels to facilitate economic exploitation.

Prost's work is seen as a unique action. Michel Ragon<sup>11</sup> considers it as the only great urban work of France under the Third Republic since Napoleon III, and the unique one to the urban planning operations of the 1950-1960. He compares the relationship between Lyautey and Prost to that linking Napoleon III and Haussmann, with an equal passion for town planning, except that Prost was an architect and not an administrator as Haussmann.

The new city of Rabat represented a new experience for the colonial regime who was willing to translate his power and modernism into urban planning. This was the first major modern achievement outside the traditional model. This centralized vision was manifested through the creation of the central core of the new colonial city. It was the supreme expression of the political, spatial and social challenge of urban production.

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<sup>6</sup>For military, political and geographical reasons, Lyautey made Rabat his place of residence and the capital of the new colonial regime, in July 27- 1912.

<sup>7</sup>JOLE Michèle, KHATIBI Abdelkabir, MARTENSSON Mona, « Urbanisme, Idéologie et ségrégation, exemple de Rabat » in Annales marocaines de sociologie, 1970.

<sup>8</sup>Forestier on mission in France suggested to Marshal Lyautey to call on a professional to design his new city. Back in France, Forestier spoke enthusiastically to George Risler, host of the social museum, about Lyautey's grandiose visions, who immediately thought of Henri Prost. This latter was former classmate of Tony Garnier at the Villa Medici, winner of the Antwerp competition in 1911. Henri Prost was one of the founders of the French society of urban planners in 1911, to which the invention of the word "urbanism" is attributed.

<sup>9</sup>Taylor Brian, «Discontinuité planifiée villes coloniales modernes au Maroc », les Cahiers de la Recherche architecturale, n° 9, Paris, January 1982, pp45-63.

<sup>10</sup>Lyautey (L.H.G), Paroles d'action, Madagascar-Sud Oranais-Oran-Maroc (1900-1926), Librairie Armond Collin, Paris, 1927, available on: <http://gallica.bnf.fr> p. 453

<sup>11</sup>Ragon Michel, *Histoire mondiale de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme moderne*, volume II, Editions Casterman. 1972,

Producers of such an operation had not limited themselves to plan a management option, but they had ensured their effective conception. To this end, all the regulatory and institutional means have been mobilized. The new city of Rabat was a field for a novel experimentation in the image of the uniqueness of the project it embodies. To ensure the implementation of the new European city, colonial Morocco invented a new mode of management and urban planning that contrasts sharply with traditional approaches. It even preceded the metropolis in the field of regulation and urban planning. Planning regulations<sup>12</sup> were drafted and signed in a record time of four months in April 16, 1914<sup>13</sup>, which shows the urgency of the project. Development plans constituted the effective tool to organize and guide the urban development pictured for this new city and also to impose the urban choices and to legitimize the expropriation operations for public utility. In addition, the institutional conduct of the project was decisive. In this sense, management system put in place was based on the strong coordination between the various services involved in urban planning<sup>14</sup>. The project was managed by a small and centralized committee, which issued the planning directives, "real political and technical advice gathered under the presidency of the Resident"<sup>15</sup>.

Technically, the execution of these urban orientations required a particular method of the soil's mobilization. It was necessary to involve the landowners (who acquired the extra-muros lands due to individual transactions and approvals by the end of the 19th century) through syndicated owners' associations. As for the construction, it was the responsibility of specialized companies. The buildings of Boulevard Mohammed V were made by the real estate company Balima<sup>16</sup>, which continues today to manage a significant rental property on the same Boulevard.

Physical spatiality is main, if not the first, visible aspect of urban reality. Lyautey have said, "The greatness of men in power is measured by the quality of their architectural achievements"<sup>17</sup>. This quote – alone- summarizes how the constructed space is a crucial expression tool of its producer. Thus, beyond the common uses and functions, designers try to transmit a message and to express a posture through the spaces they produce. They use symbols to achieve this; physical spaces become then the static expression of their intentions before being the container of spatial practices and urban functions.

### **Dar El Makhzen Avenue, An Experimental Site**

The city of Rabat, with the arrival of the Protectorate, knew the introduction of a very sharp regulation at the level of the Rabat train station in Avenue Dar El Makhzen (Lyautey courtyard or Avenue Mohammed V currently).

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<sup>12</sup>Numerous regulations were promulgated to manage the occupation of land and urban growth. Such as the establishment of a mixed management and the promulgation of the 1913 Dahir relating to the registration and use of property and Habous funds, the 1914 Dahir relating to urban planning and the expropriation of lands "Melks" and the Dahir of 1917 relating to the formation of syndicated unions to facilitate the intervention of planners. The aim of all these measures was to move from the manumilitari phase to the settlement and exploitation phase. The road and construction orders established the construction conditions in accordance with the development plan.

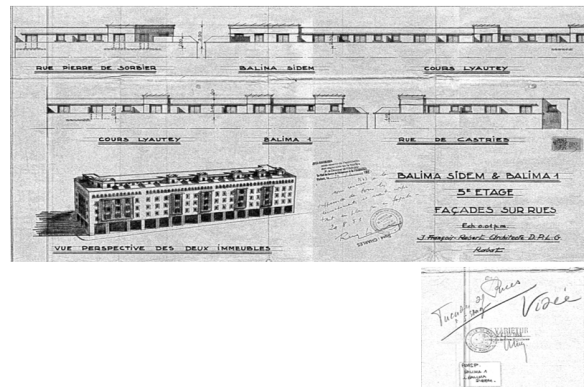
<sup>13</sup> TAYLOR Brian, 1982, op.cité.

<sup>14</sup>The architects of the City Plans Service and the Special Service of Architecture (in charge of the the Residence complex and public buildings placed under the supervision of Prost), the engineers of Bridges and Roads of the General Directorate for Public works and the Art Unit.

<sup>15</sup> Prost, quoted by VACHER Hélène, 2010, « La planification de la sauvegarde et le détour marocain (1912-1925) » in: CATTEDRA (R), GARRET (P), MILLER (C), VOLAIT (M) (dir.), *Patrimoines en situation. Constructions et usages en différents contextes urbains*

<sup>16</sup>This company is publically listed in casablanca stock

<sup>17</sup> TAYLOR Brian, 1982, op.cité.



**Figure 1: Final Proposal of Lyautey's Courtyard Facade by the Architecte J. F Robert for BALIMA Company in 1953**

This regulation imposed through the Dahir of August 12, 1927 proposed an aspect assement for the buildings facing the garden "triangle de vue". It also recommended an architectural arrangement of Dar El Makhzen<sup>18</sup> avenue (the current Avenue Mohammed V) (Figure1), accompanied by drawing up and annotated plans by the service of Architecture and Arts and Historical Monuments service, with a limitation of heights to 4 floors. At the time of Domain's land acquisition, specifications were set, where there was an obligation to conform to the drawings of Arts and the Historical Monuments service, which was in charge of drawing facades with special conditions that they "imposed"<sup>19</sup> during the construction of buildings located in this zone.

Arts and Historical Monuments' services oversaw the production of details about the colours, used materials, window's dimensions and terraces' locations. This work, performed by the architect, directed and validated by the client, was subsequently forwarded to the municipal services for authorization. The peculiarity of this procedure where the state services intervene or even draw the facades and impose them on architects in charge of plans sketching, enabled a rigorous governance of the city through an architectural charter that limited any "fortuitous" intervention. This limitation made BALIMA Company and Architects<sup>20</sup>, working on buildings located in that area, react to the situation. There were even writings by Mr. LAFORGUE<sup>21</sup> who thought that the facade's design of Hotel BALIMA drawn by the services of Arts and Historical Monuments was "anti-architectural"<sup>22</sup>.

### The New City, A State Style

Unlike the medina, the European city is extroverted. The manifestation of the state power continued, particularly through the centre building's architecture (formerly Dar El Makhzen and currently Boulevard Mohammed V). This latter was the heart and the main facade of the new colonial capital.

Lyautey wrote that this architecture is "One of the rare spectacular manifestations of a state style in the twentieth century"<sup>23</sup>. Speaking of the adopted architectural style, Laforgue said "Our architecture is, in general, frank, logical, of

<sup>18</sup> Called Lyautey's courtyard with arrival of the protectorate

<sup>19</sup> A term used by municipal services in 1913

<sup>20</sup> Armand Cerceau, Laforgue, Jean-François Robert

<sup>21</sup> Architecte in charge of BALIMA hotel

<sup>22</sup> LAFORGUE's description of BALIMA when municipal services proposed a 30 meters facade instead of 29 m

<sup>23</sup> LYAUTEY (L.H.G), 1927, op.cité.

good taste, modern...”<sup>24</sup> He believes that traditional Moroccan art deserves to be admired, preserved, restored, but not imitated, describing borrowing from Arab architecture as a major action, "There is one point, in particular, of which we do some honour. It is to be attached to one of the best characteristics of the Arab construction; the exterior sobriety... The Arab construction makes its point of honour through the line, the simplicity of the contours and facades »<sup>25</sup>

The architecture of Mohammed V Boulevard, known as "colonial" or "Arabic"<sup>26</sup>, is adopted for both the equipment and residential buildings; it is an Arabization of architectural forms imported from Europe. Some buildings on Boulevard Mohammed V are "Arabized" copies of buildings made in France, such as the dome of the treasury building, which looks like the Paris stock exchange, and the central post office, which is the twin of the Bergère telephone exchange in Paris at the same city. This architecture was based on two principles: spatial organization and architectural details. The rules of the spatial composition were thus based on the axuality, the symmetry and the regulating layout. The decoration is omnipresent referring to several artistic styles, art deco, and art nouveau, neo-Moorish and modern. On the other hand, most of the buildings are thus marked by the architecture of big public equipment.

Overall, the buildings offer pure forms of under-basement, body and crowning with the use of symmetry, repetition, alignment... and the transposition of Moroccan decorative elements as principles of generalized compositions. The monumentality of public buildings is ensured, in addition, by the use of slender columns and stone and the reservation of a whole block for a single building in certain equipment (the Bank of Morocco and the Post Office).

### **Configuration and Genesis of the New Colonial Creation**

Prost made a very precise outline for the city of Rabat in which he divided the city into several intra and extra-muros districts, well separated according to their functions and their social contents:

- **The Administrative District (1914):** Located on the highest point of the city in the intramural area, it is erected on 26.5 ha with the General Residence, which dominates the entire city.
- **City Center 1920:** Heart of Rabat city with its cultural activities but especially commercial and residential ones, this great lane is the expression of an emphatic urbanism. The large avenue Dar Makhzen (currently Mohamed V) includes major equipment: the post office, the state bank, the courthouse, the railway station. The whole is constructed around buildings of 3 to 5 floors with arcades' easements and a footprint of 20 m near the medina and 60 m on its second section.
- **Leriche Area (1920):** is the residential continuity of the administrative area. A neighbourhood of villas with gardens and Bourgreg River view.
- **Les Organgers Area (1920):** located outside the ramparts between Temara Avenue and La Victoire Avenue and it is also constituted of villas.
- **Agdal Area (1920):** built around "Jardind'essais" and made up essentially of villas.

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<sup>24</sup> LAFORGUE Adrien, *l'architecture au Maroc, le miracle marocain La région de Rabat*, Editions de la vérité marocaine, 1932.

<sup>25</sup> LYAUTEY (L.H.G), 1927, op.cité

<sup>26</sup> Jonnart Charles, General Governor of Algeria in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the instigator of this Arab architecture in northern Africa (OULEBSIR Nabila, *les usages du patrimoine, monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie (1830, 1930)*, Editions la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 2004).

- **Petit Jean Area (1920):** Between Hassan Tower, Mellah, and Océan Area. These are much populated areas. It hosted an immigrant population from Spain, Portugal and Italy.
- **Habous Town (1920):** over 4 Ha, on Temara Avenue, intended for Moroccan Officials of the protectorate.
- **Marassa (1920):** the first extra-muros area of Rabat intended for the upper middle class.

If the new towns of Meknes and Marrakesh are remotely located from the medina with 2 Km, that of Rabat is separated only by the Gallieni Boulevard. Indeed, the two urban components (new town-medina) interact and form already a harmonious whole. Prost had designed his new city while considering the existing historical milestones namely the great mosque, the palace, Bab Rouah, Hassan tower and the Chellah site. These monuments were visual landmarks where Prost had integrated the various administrative areas, public courtyard and gardens stretching from the city center to Chellah. Rabat was staged as a theatrical urban landscape. This landscape approach of Rabat's urban plan was initiated by Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier who arrived well before the Prost team and drew up a plan marked with visual cones on the city monuments.

Although Lyautey's urban project was very ambitious and met several needs, the main purpose of the new city was the establishment of modern administrative services essential to the entire Protectorate government. The chosen site was far from the sea, overlooking the old town, within the immediate south wall of the second belt of ramparts that encompassed the Sultan's palace. The European administrative district was thus located on vacant lots between the old medina to the north and the Sultan's palace and the new residence to the south. A military area was planned on the coast, to the west of ramparts. To the southwest, an industrial zone, as well as other residential areas. On the Bouregreg estuary, below the old Oudayas Kasbah, a commercial port was planned. This conception of space has given rise to homogeneous and coherent urban complexes with quality architecture, as is the case at Mohamed V Avenue and the administrative area (Leriché).

The new city of Rabat was built on Prost's development plan which considered the irregular topography of spaces, a very present vegetation, the double ramparts of the city, Almohades and Andalusian;

Prost applied new urban theories based on spatial functionalism, landscape treatment, architectural planning, zoning and the protection of the architectural heritage. Thus, buildings line up along the boulevards and streets and around the squares according to the rules of symmetry and perspective.

"The city of Rabat justly qualifies as an architectural and urban success story. Prost worked on the plans of all the cities of Morocco, but his masterpiece remains unquestionably Rabat. The capital had to present an elegant and pretty appearance. His goal was to get the most out of topography and the historic environment. As the altitude gradually increases from the medina to the Almohad ramparts, to the south, the first idea was to provide views of the ancient city, the estuary and the ocean, through the creation three large parks"<sup>27</sup>

Ecochard pays tribute to Prost and the legislator, who have allowed this urban development success:

*"The success of Prost appears in Rabat: the charm of this city comes from its layout which uses with rigorously all the new and historical resources of the space... this urban plan was achievable thanks to first-order legislative instruments, the Dahir of April 16, 1914, was well ahead of its time... "*

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Brulot, *Découverte de Rabat*, Rabat, ed la Porte, 1972



### **The Urban Composition of the New City**

Through his comprehensive conservative vision of the architectural heritage of the Muslim medinas, Lyautey wanted to completely separate indigenous towns and European cities. To occur, he commissioned Henri Prost, architect and winner of the Prix de Rome in 1902, and laureate of several competitions in 1913 to take in charge the Directorate of Architecture and Urban Planning Services of the Protectorate. The protection of the cultural heritage was the task of Arts and Historical Monuments Service, created in November 1912 by Lyautey and assigned to Maurice Tranchant de Lunel.

Regarding the creation of new towns, Lyautey's modernist urbanism attributed a great attention to the preservation of the architectural heritage of Muslim cities. Henri Prost translates the spatialization of these directives through a new architecture in Morocco.

Thus, on the one hand, he planned for the future, through the creation of experimental cities serving as a showcase for international modernism, and on the other hand, he preserved, through restoration, the Muslim city as a historic city, a frozen Muslim heritage in the name of a representation that excluded change.

Prost, urban architect, is a conductor of an architect team who was able to create a simple, harmonious and original style under the shadow of a strong political power and warned of General Lyautey. Indeed, this style is a basic element results that was considered during its intervention, which is new and original, based on the urban composition notion for the different plans he has established for Moroccan cities.

The alignments, topography and plot which were taking into account, the importance given to public space, the layout and treatment of avenues and their planting, the interest in the configuration of buildings, and the treatment of facades and architectural aesthetics, are all major principles of this urban composition in which the main characteristic is to combine urbanism and architecture and to make both of them an original instrument of spatial composition.

The Urban composition notion is an integral approach that is totally different from the urban planning currently performed in Moroccan cities.

Prost and his team have not only used basic tools to think about the city, but also how they thought to save the city image they have created.

Actually, Prost has projected itself in time and he imagined solutions to possible transformations that can alter the image of the space designed, and this by the projection of future extensions of administrative buildings structuring in the back of the plot.

Prost thought of a flexible-hard design, which looks for permanence and maintenance of the accomplished work, since a whole urban landscape can be reset by densification from its starting frame.

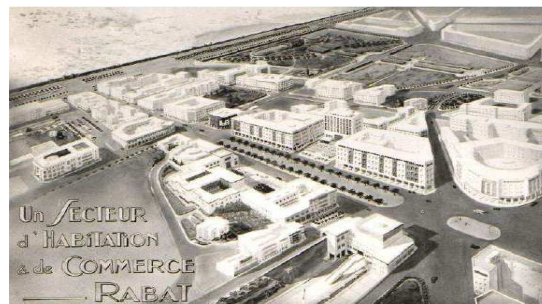
For this sustainability and conservation of the city image that confront changes and variations over time, and the example of Rabat is relevant. In addition to the expected extension at the bottom of the plot, three other modalities have been adopted for population growth management. The public gardens and the alignment plantations of Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier and Edmond Joyant contributed to resistance against the constructions surge.

The transformation of the villa zone into a bourgeois housing area, such as the case of the Agdal district, the periphery urbanization and certain activities transfer such as the case of Hay Riad, was based on the fact that Prost, through his vision, has been able to make all these transformations of elements with an updating of his plan without disproving his

initial prospect.

This frame and encouragement by the political power of a factory thought of the city, as the case of Rabat, and which allowed this urban composition with all these characteristics, was not the case for other cities, such as the one of the Côte d'Azur, and the Paris region.

In this perspective, Henri Prost experimented in Morocco, new urbanistic figures, well before they were adopted in Europe. One of his approaches was based on the urban composition. This latter is a global representation of a city or part of a city, setting rules relating to the location, implementation and development of successive construction projects while taking into account the peculiarities of the topography, which is also a three-dimensional representation of the space to be developed, though in perspective drawings.



**Figure 2**

This is a scale model illustrating Rabat as imagined by Prost to materialize Lyautey's vision.

Of the ten cities he will have to design, the colonial city of Rabat is considered his masterpiece. Henri Prost confirms his enthusiasm about the project: "Rabat, new city, and headquarters of the General Residence is one of the most beautiful subjects that can tempt any architect. A great program to achieve in a wonderful setting "The perception of this success seems widely shared:" From the point of view of harmony and unity of style, one of the models that can be cited, is the new city of Rabat. Of all the modern cities I know, it is perhaps the most interesting, perhaps the most successful. It will be one of the most original creations of modern civilization in urban planning. Particularly attractive appearance. French Rabat is currently a world famous masterpiece, a success in terms of urban and architectural arrangement.

Rabat was, the tool and the place of a privileged experimentation of a new urban art. This success is due to the global and integrated vision of the urban composition approach, "Urban composition is the oldest and most sustainable professional field of urban planning. Its role is to define physically the organization of space of the city or neighbourhood to be developed. It serves two main purposes: firstly, to provide a global image of the city or district that serves its identity and secondly, to set rules relating to the location, the establishment and the development of successive construction projects. "<sup>28</sup>

Prost represents through his Moroccan achievements of the twenties an exemplary urban art. The plans were made on a scale that allowed the architect-urbanist to ensure that the architecture conformed to the general spirit of the urban landscape that the authorities intended to control every detail.

These architectures of a resolutely modern, contextualized style in Morocco are one of the essential elements of a monumental composition that considers both the alignments and topographical delineations of a public space lined with

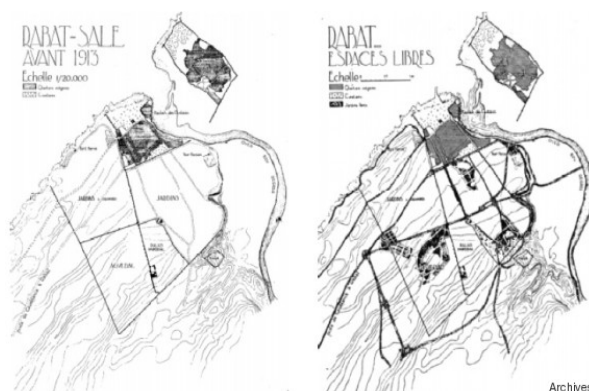
<sup>28</sup>J.P.Lacaze dans « les méthodes de l'urbanisme » CDU 22678

facades and punctuated by plantations, as well as plots fragmentation and the organization of building blocks. The aesthetics is totally controlled by the architects who are truly acting as coworkers namely Marrast, Laforgue, Laprade, Lunel Tranchant, Pauty, Marchisio, etc.<sup>29</sup>

Urban planning was closely connected to a reflection on architectural aesthetics by applying a set of urbanistic specifications leading to a respect of architectural details and the monumentality of the space and public buildings, in order to create a showcase of modernity.

To achieve faithfully the expected and conceived image of Rabat, Lyautey and his entire team, have set several measures. These latter consisted in providing an extension for administrative buildings, including the ministries, at the back of the plots, presenting accordingly an adequate configuration and a sufficiently large surface, without impacting or modifying these institutions' facades and the creation of an urban dynamic and a building construction process.

This building extension, whether for the ministries' buildings or the residential areas, has been performed in a way that ensures the preservation of the landscape from distortion other than the reduction in the number of plantations. Public gardens and alignment plantations, designed by Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier and Edmond Joyant, also resisted this surge in construction and helped to stay in harmony with the orientations of the global image of Rabat.



**Figure 3: Rabat Parks' Network as Designed by Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier**



**Figure 4: Dar El Makhzen Avenue: in the Past and Currently**

**Figure 5: Balima Building: in the Past and Currently**

<sup>29</sup>Henri Prost (1874-1959), parcours d'un urbaniste discret (Rabat, Paris, Istanbul...) mai-juin 2004 Urbanisme, n° 336: Utopie(s); ÉDITEUR: Urbanisme; pp. 79-87

Despite all the transformations that Rabat has experienced in the present day, through real problems with automobile traffic and constraints due to population growth and urban extension, the strength and vigour of the Prost plan have ordered an undeniable contemporaneity which keeps the outline of the original city unchanged to current days.

## BALIMA HOTEL A STUDY CASE

BALIMA Company, which name is an acronym of its founding partners, Lucien BARDY, André LIOREL and Louis MATHIAS, was founded in the beginning of the century<sup>30</sup>. Its main activity was real estate transactions and the construction of rental buildings. The company's asset was mainly located Rabat City center and the emblematic building that has made a name throughout its existence is Balima Hotel.

The BALIMA Hotel, built on a land originally intended to house a residential complex, enjoys a strategic location, and major constraint in terms of urban regulation and architectural planning. It is located on the bottom of the "petit square"<sup>31</sup> that was formed on the side of the Lyautey Park (former Dar El Makhzen Avenue and current Mohammed V Avenue) and in front of the Palace of Justice (current parliament), built at the same time by BALIMA company.



**Figure 6: Simplistic (Schematic) Mass Plan of the Location of the Hotel Bâlima, Karima Berdouz Architecte 2018**

BALIMA Hotel was considered by the municipal administration as a means of "brightening up"<sup>32</sup> the architectural planning present in this part of the city. It was considered by the department of Arts as an element to furnish the space. A terrace and a passage characterize the BALIMA Hotel, which was the subject of a complex administrative procedure in the 1930s.

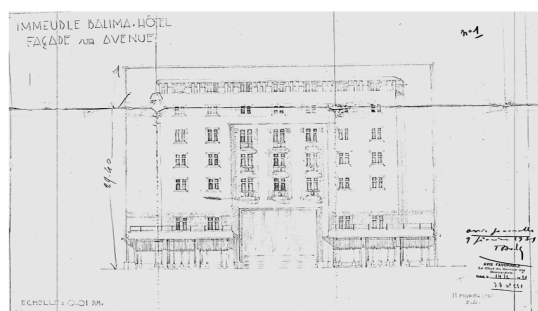
BALIMA terrace, a plot of 1321m<sup>2</sup> is part of a property called «Dar El Makhzen State Building". It was acquired by the Sherifien State for a cooperative consortium of real estate, commerce and finance, according to the administrative act on April 12, 1930 for an amount of two million five hundred francs (2,000,500.00F). This parcel (plan1) will be struck by an easement of passage of a width of 8.50m and a length of 15.50m, allowing to connect the terrace to the nice street and to arrange a view on the municipality garden.

<sup>30</sup> The first building permit delivered to Balima Company for the construction of architectural order buildings dates back to March 3, 1923 performed by the architecte Mr HANQUET on Dar El Makhzen avenue (current Mohammed V avenue)

<sup>31</sup> Petit Square was referred to in a correspondence of the municipal administration N°3488AM of May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1931 and was sent to the chief civil inspector of Rabat Region.

<sup>32</sup> A term used in a correspondence of the municipal administration in May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1931 and was sent to the chief civil inspector of Rabat Region when referring to BALIMA Hotel.

Subsequently, the Sherifien State, through an administrative act of July 4, 1931, surrendered a parcel of 272m<sup>2</sup> to the same company in compensation for this easement of passage, and on which the company BALIMA, was authorized to build only one front of the building in the basement and the ground floor. This agreement is signed according to a concurrence that was signed and that was accepted by all stakeholders, namely the municipal administration, the General Secretariat of the Protectorate, the Finance Department and the legal representatives of the company BALIMA on July 04, 1931



**Figure 7: Proposal of Facade of the Hotel Bâlima, Presented by LAFORGUE, Validated At first Time by the Service (Department) of the Fine Arts (School of Fine Arts), Rabat (Flap) Morocco, February 11th, 1931**

While this administrative procedure was still ongoing, the construction work of BALIMA hotel started without authorization, taking advantage of the opening of a building site by the same company, namely, the courthouse and a set of buildings forming the architectural ordinance.

It was at this point and during a simple routine check by the municipal administration that the Dahiroffencein 1924 was detected while works reached the second floor; it is then that the first Application for a building permit was filed in March 1931.

At this stage, Project Architect M. LAFORGUE presented a 29-meter-high building with a setback terrace, something that was refused by municipal services.

In a series of correspondences, of back and forth and blockages at the level of the municipal administration concerning the validation of the heights and the facade of the Hotel, BALIMA (Figure 7) company stopped all its on-going projects in the capital (Balima buildings 3 and 2 and the courthouse<sup>33</sup>). It even adjourned nearly 700 "European workers" paid by the day, something that has created discontent with a working population in Rabat and with the permanent resident of the Protectorate. This means of pressure has led the parties to move to a more flexible negotiation. Finally, the decision of the building permit was issued on November 17, 1931.

### **BALIMA HOTEL, A FAÇADE, A LANGUAGE, A SYMBOL**

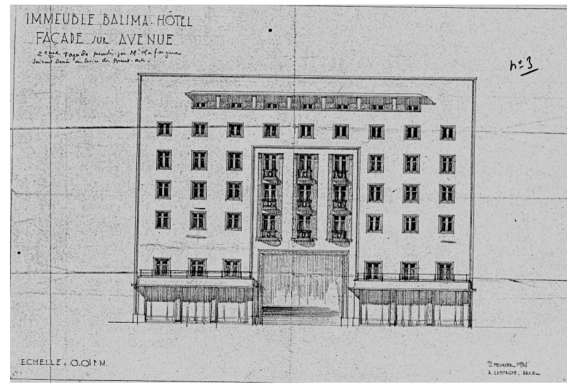
All facades built during this period, were the work of arts and historical monuments service. They had even sparked a popular debate on the "chaotic"<sup>34</sup> aesthetic aspect of Lyautey Avenue. The proposal of the Hotel

<sup>33</sup> Current parliament

<sup>34</sup> Used by the municipal administration to describe the facades proposed by the departement of Arts and Historical Monuments.

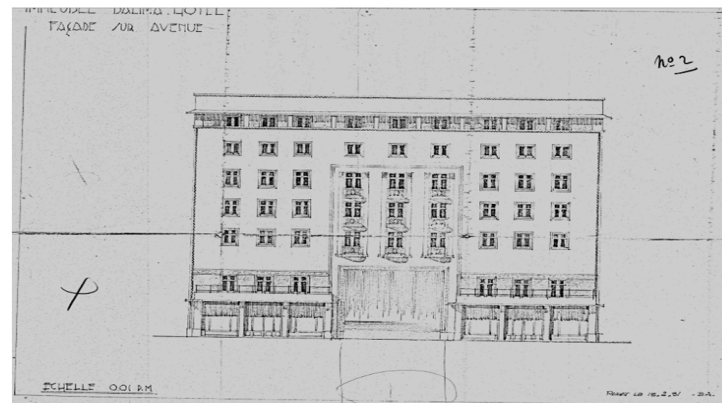


BALIMA(Figure 8) in decline with a height exceeding the authorized 29m, it was considered, rather as "a belfry"<sup>35</sup> than a residential building with its disproportionate dimensions of height with 30.55m brought back later to 29m, a facade of 36m and a depth of 13m.



**Figure 8: Proposal of Facade of the Hotel Bâlima, Presented by LAFORGUE, Not Validated by the Service (Department) of the Fine Arts (School of Fine Arts), Rabat (Flap) Morocco, February 02nd, 1931**

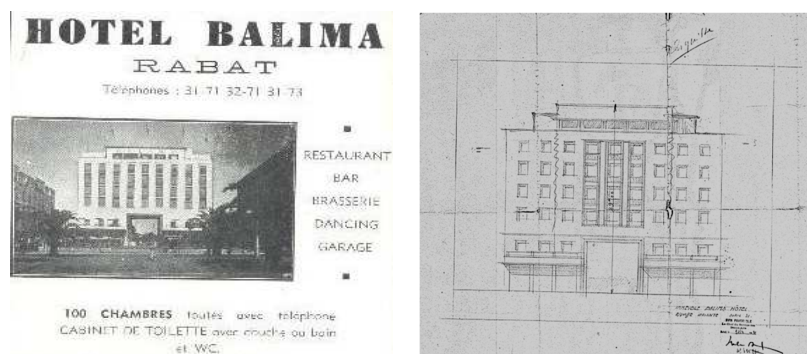
Municipal services often insisted on the effect of unity, which can only be achieved through the strict application of easements, and that any derogation could only lead to destroy the desired symmetry as expected by the authors of the urban plan. This was necessary for the harmony of the city, already compromised by successive modifications to this plan.



**Figure 9: Proposal of Facade of the Hotel Bâlima, Presented by LAFORGUE, Not Validated by the Service(Department) of the Fine Arts (School of Fine Arts), Rabat (Flap) Morocco, February 15th, 1931**

The height of BALIMA Hotel was the headline of many newspapers (figure 9), claiming that this question concerned the aesthetics of Rabat as a whole(Figure 9).

<sup>35</sup> Used by the municipal administration to describe BALIMA Hotel in 1931.



**Figure 10: Proposal of Facade of the Hotel Bâlima, Presented by LAFORGUE, Corrected by the Service (Department) of the Fine arts (School of Fine Arts), Rabat (Flap) Morocco, April 10th, 1931**

## ARCHITECTURAL STYLES OF THE NEW CITY

The architecture of the early twentieth century in Morocco was designed according to a logic that consists in providing cultural and symbolic landmarks that differ from those of the Arab-Islamic civilization, incarnated in the medinas, while maintaining – at the same time – its soul without a complete detachment. It is a process punctuated by a series of architectural productions; there are beautiful cities, natives' neighbourhoods, workers' neighbourhoods and villas.

The 20s of twentieth century are the culmination of art deco. They also reveal the experimentation of a decorative art that is sought after for its new techniques and materials such as reinforced concrete, which offers new freedoms of expression. The 20's and 30's buildings bear multiple influences (with a central body and balconies, a loggia in the form of an attic with composite capitals that resembles the neo-baroque of Northern Italy). Decorative art emerged in 1925 and used materials for ornamentation purposes (wood, faience, iron, glass) composing a coherent whole.

The city releases a progressive discovery of sites and buildings. These components reflect the fusion of Western and Muslim architectural features. To these very neat constructions, has added an ornamental research for each building or house. This is a customization of architecture punctuated with traditional decoration. This design produces a warm environment. Thus, Rabat is an enormous success. The city centre synthesizes the different architectural styles that are defined by the shape, the proportions, and the provisions of the salient parts of the building: columns, pilasters, capitals and entablatures. The architecture of the twentieth century allowed the creation of a repertoire of forms and spaces of remarkable richness ranging from culturalist architecture of prestige and power, to the habitat of the greatest number.

In Rabat, the majority of Dar El Makhzen Avenue buildings (currently Mohammed V Avenue), is marked by a neo-Moorish architecture and art deco.

In this city, the architecture of the first half of the 20th century is characterized by a variety of styles according to political events and architectural trends. It gave rise to:

- Buildings with facades following a specific architectural arrangement
- A new architecture open on the outside.
- Decor elements.

Between 1920 and 1930, the construction of the courthouse, the state bank, the central station and the post office was completed. They were designed with such refinement, by different architects like Laforgue and Laprade within the

framework of the regulating law of heights "these buildings retain the spirit of aesthetics and architectural space programming of open urban spaces as defined by the service of Prost. They offer a volumetric image - less fragmentary than Casablanca- of the European conception of a modern and civilized "urban fabric"<sup>36</sup>

The main historical and theoretical components of the so-called colonial architectural form refer mainly to the architectural design of the School of Fine Arts; they are used as a source of inspiration. There were other trends directly inspired by the local architecture: an architecture called "Arabisation" represented by the first public facilities built between 1914 and 1930, which uses elements of traditional Moroccan architecture and applies them in a new architectural form. A little later, we perceived the appearance of a so-called Mediterranean architecture, which broke sharply with traditional forms.

The colonial facade in Rabat has many elements and principles conveyed by the School of Fine Arts that boils down to order, symmetry, harmony and proportion



**Figure 11**

The fusion and symbiosis of the architectural trends during the Protectorate made several styles coexist within the new Kingdom's capital.

### **The Néo-Classic Style**

Since 1914, we have seen some edifices built in this style, which is characterized by an order in the classical composition of forms and the insertion of symbols of the ancient Greco-Roman civilization (columns, portico, and pediment). It is also characterized by the use of cherubs' sculptures, fruits or flowers, lion heads and shells...



**Figure 12**

<sup>36</sup> Brian Taylor, *Discontinuité planifiée des villes coloniales modernes du Maroc*, in *Revue Lotus international*, n° 26, 1980



### **The Neo-Moorish or Neo-Traditional Style**

The imprint of the Arab-Muslim style and the Moroccan style characterizes this style. It originated at the turn of the 19th century and the 20th century, produced within the general framework of architectural and urban policy conducted in North Africa between 1830 and 1930. The factors that influenced the emergence of this movement are diverse. The constitution of town planning as an autonomous discipline in 1910 and the development of a regionalist architecture in which Arabism had its place. The political, technical and artistic questions posed by the cities, contributed to the development of this reflection, without forgetting the role of Lyautey who put architecture and urbanism at the forefront of his concerns in the colonial administration who admired the grandeur of Rome, the sobriety of Arab architecture and the charm of Moroccan cities.

"There is one point, in particular, of which we do ourselves some honour. It is to be attached to one of the best features of Arab construction. The exterior sobriety [...] The Arab construction is distinguished by the line, the simplicity of the contours and facades"

Lyautey, paroles d'action 1926.

The decorative elements are mainly used to emphasize the sobriety of volumes. They come from a repertoire traditionally reserved for the interior space of buildings. The exterior architectural details are the manifestation of this current Arabization present in the center of Rabat.

"It was a transposition of European architectural elements into an Arabic stylistic register and adaptation to European roles," said some authors.

A style, which is used in different variants. The first achievements of the French architects gave much more importance to the decor and the monumentality by:

- The use of semicircular or broken arches in windows and doors and rows of arches;
- Frame windows with traditional patterns and cornices topped with green tiles;
- The profusion of decoration and ornamentation in the form of plaster sculpture or polychrome zellige panels;
- The use of loggias with balustrades, coloured glass trellises and moucharabiehs.



**Figure 13**



**Figure 14**

By symmetry, the order of this facade provides the character of strength, monumentality thus representing the tradition of the school of fine arts. However, we notice on the facade a decoration, which recalls the traditional

architecture, integrated with the classic European characters, which gives it a lot of originality.

The front of the main facade of the post office expresses the theme of the triumphal arch with the tripartite opening and the importance of the central one compared to the others, but with the integration of the glazed green tile in crowning as a reminder of traditional arts. The golden rectangle, rectangle V2 and square-proportions drawings are used simultaneously and fix the locations and sizing of the different elements.

**L'art Nouveau:** this so-called "Arabisation" architecture, valued locally in large part, did not fail to have common points with French architecture at the time. Taking advantage of certain contributions of industrial civilization in the order of programs or in that of techniques, a new order had originated in France, that of art nouveau or the 1900 style. It asserted itself as an anti-historical art, an enemy of pastiche, and by this desire to break with the past; it played an important role in the introduction of modern forms. The style of 1900 gave rise to forms marked by certain influences such as, the influence of Gothic art in its flamboyant forms; it is found in a decorative system where the curves, reversed curves and sinuosities come into view. This new art is also marked by the influence of plant naturalism, the plant, especially the flower is abundant in architecture.

### **Art Deco Style**

It was an extremely influential artistic movement, especially in architecture. It appeared in Morocco in the mid-twenties and guaranteed its permanence until the early forties. It is a style turned to pure forms and essentially geometric, it had the curvature replaced by the right angle. The volumes are parallel epipedic, with sharp angles, or rounded or with cut sides, the circle and the octagon are also used. It is also characterized by:

- A simplicity of forms;
- Decor geometry;
- A set of parallel lines, hexagons, triangles and lozenges;
- Facade animation of a series of salient and re-entrant, vertical well marked and highlighted by parallel games;
- Balconies and loggias where ironwork with undulating suppleness are juxtaposed with straight lines forming beams in the cement decoration of the facades;
- Decorative panels and corner gables;
- A geometric or floral carved decoration is distributed in frieze or panels, executed in stucco, and sometimes replaced by the coloured mosaic;
- The facade is punctuated by square towers, surmounted by flat and overflowing roofs.



**Figure 15**

### **Modern Style**

Also known as, international style is an architectural trend that flourished between the 1920s and the late 1960s around the world. This trend originated from a modern movement. Its main characteristic is to build edifices in complete rupture with the traditions of the past and highlighting the volumes by smooth, regular and unadorned exterior surfaces. This style is characterized by:

- Bare facades.
- A voluminous work.

A new formal style founded and dictated by concrete and a taste of sobriety. Thus, we find similarities with some trends already prevalent in France, especially with the works of Robert Mallet-Stevens. We also note the undeniable influence of Le Corbusier

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Following the architectural and urbanistic effort initiated by Prost and covered by the leadership of Lyautey, architects, urban planners and landscapers teams have contributed, including A. Laprade, Adrien Laforgue, Marius Boyer, Joseph Marrast... The Moroccan architectural tradition in the Medina of Rabat has influenced these French architects in their reflections leading them to a new architecture. Its urban components and architectural elements have also influenced the design of these architects to build unique and original edifices. As a result, Rabat has become a garden city with a modern and innovative urbanism, by its ordered axes, its zoning and its architectural stamping where current architectural styles are mixed in a harmonious way.

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### Images and Illustrations

- **Figure 1:** proposal of validated facade run (roam) Lyautey by the Architect J.F Robert for the Company BALIMA year 1953, archives of the municipality of Hassan
- **Image 2:** proposal of facade of the Hotel Bâlima, presented by LAFORGUE, validated at first time by the service (department) of the Fine arts (School of Fine Arts), Rabat (Flap) Morocco, February 11th, 1931
- **Figure 6:** simplistic (schematic) mass plan of the location of the Hotel Bâlima, Karima Berdouz Architecte 2018
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